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connect

Blackboardconnect))
for Teachers

Notification System Usage Guidelines

Revised November 2014

OVERVIEW

The **Blackboard Connect** service is a two-pronged mass communication system that allows schools and the District to disseminate important messages to parents and staff within minutes. The **Blackboard Connect** notification system is an Internet-based tool which enables schools to send voice, text and e-mail messages to students and parents/guardians to support emergency notification and response, community involvement, and student attendance.

The **Blackboard Connect for Teachers** system allows teachers to send pre-programed messages to the students' families.

The **Blackboard Connect** service provides the technology, comprehensive reports, tips, and customer support needed for effective use of the system. All that is required to use this system is a **Blackboard Connect** account, a personal computer with Internet access, a web browser and a phone.

This document provides designated users of the Los Angeles Unified School District with recommended procedures and practical suggestions for the appropriate and effective use of **Blackboard Connect** in sending important information to parents and staff.

If you need immediate assistance in using the **Blackboard Connect** notification system, you may call the **Blackboard Connect** 24-hour Customer Care at (866 435-7684) or email to support@blackboardconnected.com.

ACCESS TO BLACKBOARD CONNECT

Schools	Multiple staff members at each school will be allowed access to the system (e.g., the principal, other administrators, and a staff member responsible for attendance monitoring). Only designated staff may record and distribute messages to families and employees of their school. An exception is made for the individual recordings of messages in languages other than English. A principal may designate another staff member to record such messages, but passwords must be protected in accordance with District policy.
Educational Service Center (ESC)	Educational Service Center (ESC) Administrators of Operations have the ability to send messages to the parents and staff at all schools within their ESC (North, South, East, West and ISIC).
Central Office	The offices of the Superintendent will have complete access to the system, and will coordinate all emergency messages on behalf of the District. All messages are administered by the School Operations Blackboard Connect Support Team.
Other	Other groups or offices not specifically mentioned above can utilize the system with approval of the local site administrator and the Assistant Superintendent, School Operations.

Blackboard Connect User Roles

The system allows for one user role. The chart below describes the user role, level of access, and personnel typically assigned to the role.

Role	Access Description	Types of Users
Standard User	Able to send all types of notifications, including outreach general notifications, attendance, and emergency; can also create contact groups within the school population	Administrator of Operations, Principals, Assistant Principals, Coordinators, School Administrative Assistants and other principal designees



When employees are transferred or leave the District's employment, access to **Blackboard Connect** will be terminated.

If additional employees require access to **Blackboard Connect**, they must submit the Blackboard Connect User ID Request Form available at the District Blackboard Connect website:

(http://notebook.lausd.net/portal/page?_pageid=33,1182797&_dad=ptl&_schema=PTL_EP).

ACCESS TO BLACKBOARD CONNECT FOR TEACHERS

Schools All teachers may access the Blackboard Connect for Teachers system.

Blackboard Connect for Teacher User Roles

The system allows for two types of access, in the form of user roles. The chart below describes the user role, level of access, and personnel typically assigned to the role.

Role	Access Description	Types of Users
Site Manager	Able to activate/deactivate teacher accounts for the Blackboard Connect for Teachers system. Can also limit available comments and is the main point of contact for the teachers at the school site.	Principals, Assistant Principals; Principal Designees.
Teacher	Able to send pre-programmed messages to their students' homes.	Teachers (with permanent assignment or long-term substitute)

USAGE

Schools can only use the system at the express direction of the principal. Each principal should carefully consider and communicate to appropriate staff the way in which this tool will be incorporated into existing school communication efforts and plans. In addition, please keep the following points in mind.

- The system should only be used for matters within the local control and authority of the District, unless directed otherwise by the Superintendent or an ESC Administrator of Operations.
- The system must be used in accordance with all related District policies and rules.
- The system may not be used to disseminate information on behalf of political candidates or parties, unions, religious organizations, or to advertise commercial events or products.
- The system should not be used for the dissemination of non-essential information that could more appropriately be conveyed through other communications vehicles. Overuse of the system for the dissemination of non-essential messages could potentially overburden or irritate recipients.
- Care should be taken to eliminate duplicate messages sent to the same recipients containing the same or similar information. In general, if two children attend the same school, and a message is sent to all families within that school, the system **will** automatically remove the duplication. But if two children in *different grades* attend the same school, and one message is sent to one grade and a different message sent to the other, the system **will not** remove the duplication.



MESSAGE TYPES

Below is a description of the four types of messages available to schools and offices.

Attendance	Attendance messages alert parents/guardians to student absences on the day of the absence. Attendance messages are sent automatically twice a day in the morning and evening. Attendance messages are sent for all unexcused absences and tardies.
Outreach	Outreach messages notify parents/guardians and staff of important news or developments, upcoming events, PTSA meetings, fundraisers, report cards, and similar happenings within the District or school.
Emergency	<p>Emergency messages can include weather-related disasters or any incidents and events that endanger the health and safety of students or employees. Unlike the other types of messages, emergency messages are made to all telephone numbers in the Blackboard Connect system for each student and employee.</p> <p>Any emergency pertaining to the entire District, or a significant percentage of schools, will be sent from LAUSD Central Office. The Superintendent, or designee, sends all weather-related emergency messages, such as school closure due to flood.</p> <p>For emergencies at individual schools, principals should consult with their ESC Administrator of Operations, prior to sending any message. Schools no longer have to rely on the local media to convey information to parents during an emergency situation.</p> <p>A school can quickly minimize concern by issuing an emergency message through Blackboard Connect. Keep in mind that parents' first question will be about the safety and well-being of their own children. Therefore, the script for any emergency call must include the most complete information available, while addressing typical issues, such as special dismissal schedules, or where to pick up their children.</p> <p><i>Example: A school must go to a designated shelter just before dismissal because an outsider is being sought by police. Hearing the report over their police scanners, television stations send crews to the school and begin live reports. Using Blackboard Connect, the principal could contact parents to let them know students are safe and will be dismissed as soon as is practicable, and then follow up with a second telephone call when dismissal begins.</i></p>
Interactive Survey	Interactive survey messages allow recipients, using a telephone keypad, to RSVP for school events or to provide input on school issues. Responses are automatically captured and reported through the Blackboard Connect system.

MESSAGE FREQUENCY

Blackboard Connect, has researched best-practice methods that should govern LAUSD usage.

- Attendance and emergency calls should be made only as needed.
- Parents appreciate the timely notice, no matter how frequent. This includes reminder calls to select groups of students (a weekly Thursday evening call to students involved in Saturday morning tutoring, for example).
- Community outreach and interactive survey messages to all parents in a school should be limited to 2-3 calls per month.
- No more than 15-20 District-wide community outreach or interactive survey calls should be made in a school year.



MESSAGE LENGTH

Messages should last no longer than 60 seconds. If a message is longer than 60 seconds, a recipient is likely to lose interest and hang up; or an answering machine or voice mail system may cease to record after that length of time. Best practice suggests that messages of 30 to 45 seconds are optimal. This allows adequate time to record important points without losing the recipient's attention.

MESSAGE DELIVERY TIMES

Because **Blackboard Connect** will make several attempts to deliver calls that initially meet busy signals or go unanswered, please schedule your calls to start in the afternoon, no later than 6:30 p.m.; this allows for repeat attempts to be completed by 7:30 p.m. on the date of delivery. Do not schedule messages to be delivered between the hours of 9 p.m. and 8 a.m. unless the message is time-sensitive or emergency-related. **Note: Remember to select Pacific Time when scheduling message delivery.**

MESSAGE RECORDING OPTIONS

Messages can be recorded in three ways: record with voice, text-to-speech or a hybrid of the two approaches. The "record with voice" option should be used whenever possible. The "text-to-speech" or "hybrid" options are only appropriate for **attendance** messages.

Text-to-speech messages can be delivered in English or Spanish; a general attendance message has been recorded for schools that choose this option for attendance messages. In a text-to-speech attendance message the first name of the student, the date and the school name is automatically inserted into each call. Two disadvantages exist in using the text-to-speech option: 1) text-to-speech voice is computer-generated and not as effective as using natural speech, and 2) the message cannot be listened to prior to sending. **When using the text-to-speech option, always proofread your message carefully.**

The District asks that schools use the "record with voice" option for most messages. Best practice suggests that each school establish a single voice for its messages (or a voice in each language in which messages are delivered, if necessary) to make the messages recognizable and more credible. The principal is the preferred voice for a school. The "record with voice" option is especially effective when delivering emergency messages. It personalizes the call and lends a familiar, reassuring tone to an emergency situation. Also, a school or the District can listen to a "record with voice" message, prior to delivery, to check for accuracy.

MESSAGE LANGUAGE PREFERENCES

Messages should be recorded in the languages spoken by the majority of LAUSD families at your site. **Blackboard Connect** provides language delivery options based on the home language preference stored in LAUSD's student information system – MiSiS.

Each school should designate appropriate staff members to translate or record messages in languages other than English. If a school has no staff member capable of providing a high-quality translation of a script, **Blackboard Connect** provides a translation service which will translate and record your message in the desired language. The service takes approximately one hour to complete.



DISTRICT-WIDE MESSAGES

The Superintendent, in consultation with appropriate senior staff, will coordinate all District-wide messages. Emergency calls may include school closings or delays due to natural disasters, inclement weather, or other occurrences that may affect the health and safety of students, faculty, and staff.

The Superintendent will also deliver messages to parents about District-wide events or special meetings, such as the Superintendent's Town Hall meetings, college and/or job fairs, and more.

For all other District-wide messages, a request must be submitted in writing to the School Operations Division, Blackboard Connect Support Team for review and approval at least 2 working days prior to the requested date of delivery. The written request should include the date and time of message delivery, the target audience, the general nature of the message, and a contact name and telephone number.

Submitting a request does not guarantee approval for District-wide delivery. Once approved, the messages must be recorded no later than 12 pm of the day of message delivery. Failure to record the message by the deadline jeopardizes the message being delivered by the requested time.

Written requests may be sent to:

School Operations Division
Blackboard Connect Support Team
Attention: Paul Ishimaru or Cheryl Ruiz
333 South Beaudry Avenue, 18th Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90017
(213) 241-1085 / paul.ishimaru@lausd.net or cheryl.ruiz@lausd.net

MESSAGE DELIVERY DATA

Blackboard Connect sends detailed information about the receipt of every call to the person originating the message. Principals should frequently examine this data (hang ups, length a listener stayed on the call, etc.), and measure indicators such as attendance at events about which parents were notified to determine the effectiveness of the messages. ESC Administrators of Operations should monitor school usage data to ensure the District is optimizing its return on the **Blackboard Connect** investment.

MISSING/INCORRECT TELEPHONE NUMBERS

The **Blackboard Connect** system relies on student and employee contact information provided by the District's student information systems and human resources system. Ensuring that every student and employee is included in the notification system is the responsibility of the schools and offices. Schools can request from the **Blackboard Connect** Client Care Help Desk a listing of students without contact information in the notification system. In addition, the after call report includes message delivery data listing the telephone numbers that do not work next to the corresponding student's name. Schools must contact families with bad telephone numbers, on a regular basis, and obtain current data to replace old data in the student information system. Please refer to the LAUSDnet [Blackboard Connect website](#) for guidance.



TIPS FOR RECORDING MESSAGES

Prepare

- Know what you want to say. Make notes or bullets, practice, and then record the message.
- Listen to your message after recording. Repeat recording until you are comfortable with the message.

Repeat important information

- Repeat important information (e.g., time, date, and location of a meeting) at least twice during the message – at the beginning and at the end of the message. Repeat important information.

Grab their Attention

- Let the recipient know immediately that the message contains important information from the school.
- Begin the message with, “Hello, this is (principal’s name), principal of (school name) with an important message for you...”

Be Yourself

- Deliver your message as if you are speaking to a parent across the table.
- Think about tone, inflection, emphasis, but most importantly be natural.

Provide Contact Information

- Let the recipient know who to contact (telephone number or email address) should they have questions or need additional information.

SAMPLE MESSAGES

Throughout the school year, the School Operations Division will be in contact with principals to offer suggestions on possible messages to be sent to parents. The recommendations will be sent by e-mail on a regular basis. Below is an initial set of examples:

Attendance

Hello, this is (principal’s name), principal of (school name), calling to inform you that your child was absent today. As you know daily school attendance is critical to promoting high academic achievement. Please contact (attendance clerk’s name) to discuss your child’s absence. As always, thank you for your support in helping us provide your child with a quality education. Should you have questions, please call the school at 000-000-0000.

Start of School

Hello, this is (principal’s name), principal of (school name), with an important message for you. I am calling to welcome you and your child to an exciting new school year. We look forward to the first day of school on (first day of school). The faculty and staff are excited about the year ahead and partnering with you to help provide a quality education for your child. We look forward to seeing you on (first day of school). In the interim, please feel free to call us at 000-000-0000.

Open House

Hello, this is (principal’s name), principal of (school name), with an important message for you. I am calling to invite you to our open house on (day and date), at (time). This will be a great opportunity for you to visit your child’s classroom and meet your child’s teachers. We hope that you will make plans to join us. We look forward to seeing you on (day and date) at (time) for our open house. For more information please call the school at 000-000-0000.



Fundraiser

Hello, this is (principal's name), principal of (school name). I am calling to inform you of a school-wide fundraiser that we are sponsoring. It is called (name of fundraiser). We hope to use the proceeds to (purpose of fundraiser). On (day/date) your child will bring home information about the fundraiser. We hope you will support this effort. As always, thank you for your continued support in helping us provide a quality education for your child. For more information, please call Mr./Ms. _____ at 000-000-0000.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- Q1. How many telephone numbers and email addresses for a particular student can the **Blackboard Connect** system accommodate?
- A1. The system can hold five telephone numbers and two email addresses per student. Multiple numbers are called only in emergency situations.
- Q2. I am a principal at ABC High School. Can I send messages to the homes of students attending the middle schools in my feeder pattern?
- A2. No; principals can send messages only to the homes of students within their own schools. However, principals are encouraged to work together to send messages that may be initiated by one school but impact other schools within the feeder pattern. For example, ABC High School is hosting an informational session about upcoming jazz band auditions. Incoming ninth-grade students currently in the eighth grade at the local middle school may be interested in the auditions. The principals at the two schools may choose to work together to make sure the message gets to appropriate students at both schools. Alternatively, the ESC office can assist by sending messages to any school within the ESC.
- Q3. Can messages be sent to parents' e-mail addresses?
- A3. The **Blackboard Connect** system does have the capability to send messages to e-mail addresses. Schools may enter up to two email address per parent/guardian contact in the MiSiS student information system
- Q4. I am an elementary school principal. A grade-specific test is just a few weeks away and I want to send a message to just the parents of all fourth-grade students in my school reminding them of this important test. Is this possible?
- A4. Yes; **Blackboard Connect** allows you to create subgroups within your school. For instance, you can create groups by grade level, club affiliation, and other classifications.
- Q5. What is the maximum number of subgroups I am able to create?
- A5. With the Blackboard Connect system, there is no limit to the number of subgroups you can create.
- Q6. From where does **Blackboard Connect** obtain student contact information?
- A6. The information is downloaded daily MiSiS for K-12 student contact information, which means that the information used by **Blackboard Connect** is only as good as the information maintained by schools. Information for early education and adult schools are uploaded weekly.
- Q7. Does the **Blackboard Connect** system provide me with any data regarding the status of calls delivered?
- A7. Yes; principals receive daily reports via e-mail with detailed information about calls made for their schools. One of the items on the reports is a list of bad phone numbers. It is important that principals print this list and follow established procedures for correcting bad or inaccurate contact information.
- Q8. How do I receive additional help or training for **Blackboard Connect**?
- A8. You may call the **Blackboard Connect** 24-hour Customer Care at (866 435-7684).
- Q9. How do I get access to **Blackboard Connect for Teachers**?
- A9. Access is granted by the Site Manager at your school which is normally the principal or their designee.

